health and welfare canada
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Office of the Minister
The Honourable Jake Epp

Cabinet du ministre
l'honorable Jake Epp

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS

BY THE HONOURABLE JAKE EPP,

MINISTER OF NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

FOR THE ALLERGY INFORMATION ASSOCIATION'S SYMPOSIUM

ALLERGIES & CHANGING TIMES

WINNIPEG

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1988

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
23/88

Health and Welfare Canada
Santé et Bien-être social Canada
Canada

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN...

I'M DELIGHTED TO HAVE BEEN ASKED BY MRS. IRVINE TO JOIN YOU THIS MORNING TO OPEN THIS SYMPOSIUM AS PART OF ALLERGY AWARENESS MONTH. IT'S A PLEASURE TO BE HERE.

I WANT TO CONGRATULATE EVERYONE INVOLVED IN PUTTING TOGETHER TODAY'S PROGRAM. FROM THE LIST OF DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS AND THE RANGE OF TOPICS YOU ARE COVERING, I KNOW IT WILL BE A VERY STIMULATING AND FULL DAY.

TODAY WE ARE TALKING ABOUT ALLERGIES AND CHANGING TIMES. WE LIVE IN SUCH A DYNAMIC PERIOD OF HISTORY THAT CHANGE IS SOMETHING WE'VE COME TO EXPECT IN MANY AREAS OF OUR LIVES. WITH OUR FAST DEVELOPING TECHNOLOGY, ALL OF US ARE BECOMING EXPERTS AT CHANGE. BUT AS YOU KNOW, POSITIVE CHANGE ISN'T SOMETHING THAT JUST HAPPENS. PEOPLE MAKE IT HAPPEN. THE EXCITING THING FOR ME, AS MINISTER OF NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELFARE IS THAT WE ARE LIVING IN A TIME WHERE PEOPLE FEEL REAL IMPROVEMENTS IN HEALTH ARE POSSIBLE AND WORTH WORKING TOWARDS. AND THE WORK WE ARE DOING TODAY IS ONE OF THE BEST WAYS I KNOW OF TO SUSTAIN THE MOMENTUM.

IN THE EIGHTIES, MEDICAL SCIENCE HAS DONE MUCH TO INCREASE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMMUNE SYSTEM AND ALLERGIES. ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE ALLERGY INFORMATION ASSOCIATION (AIA) AND THE CANADIAN SOCIETY OF ALLERGY AND CLINICAL IMMUNOLOGY (CSACI) ARE IN THE FRONT LINE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS. THE AIA GETS THE NEWS OUT TO PEOPLE WHO NEED IT FAST, WHILE THE CANADIAN SOCIETY OF ALLERGY AND CLINICAL IMMUNOLOGY KEEPS MEMBER HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS UP TO DATE ON CONSTANTLY IMPROVING DIAGNOSIS AND SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES. HOWEVER, WE ARE STILL A LONG WAY FROM THE IDEAL ANSWER -- A TREATMENT TO END ALLERGIC PROBLEMS ONCE AND FOR ALL.

SO AVOIDANCE IS STILL THE FRONT-LINE TREATMENT FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS. IT'S FAR FROM A PERFECT REMEDY. ONE AREA WHERE AVOIDANCE IS STILL A MATTER OF DAILY CONCERN IS FOOD.

THE EVERYDAY FOODS COMMONLY INVOLVED IN ALLERGIC REACTION -- LIKE CORN, EGGS, MILK AND NUTS -- ARE FOUND IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER IN SO MANY PRODUCTS THAT AVOIDANCE DEMANDS CONSTANT VIGILANCE AND A LOT OF CREATIVITY IN FINDING ALTERNATIVES. BUT EVEN AVOIDANCE IS BECOMING EASIER, AS SOCIETY DEVELOPS A GREATER AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM.

BACK IN THE 1960'S, WHEN THE ALLERGY INFORMATION ASSOCIATION FIRST BEGAN, PARENTS OF ALLERGIC CHILDREN FOUND THEMSELVES IN A DESPERATE SITUATION. THERE WAS REALLY NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT WAS IN MOST OF THE PRODUCTS YOU PURCHASED. AND THERE WAS NOWHERE TO TURN FOR HELP. TODAY, THANKS TO THE AIA, PEOPLE COPING WITH ALLERGIES ARE NO LONGER ALONE.

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, THE AIA HAS BUILT A REPUTATION AS A BEACON FOR THE ALLERGIC, OFFERING COUNSEL AND SUPPORT, AND WORKING TIRELESSLY TO ENCOURAGE LIAISON BETWEEN THE HEALTH CARE COMMUNITY, THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY AND OTHERS WHOSE PRODUCTS OR SERVICES COULD IMPACT ON ALLERGIES.

FROM ITS ORIGINS AS A SMALL GROUP OF PARENTS COMING TOGETHER FOR MUTUAL SUPPORT, THE AIA HAS GROWN INTO A HIGHLY RESPECTED ORGANIZATION WITH OVER 4000 MEMBERS. THE ASSOCIATION NOW OFFERS A COMPLETE PROGRAM OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. AND IT HAS SERVED AS A FOCUS FOR TREMENDOUS ENERGY AND ACTIVISM TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND CHANGE IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY.

WORKING IN COOPERATION WITH MY DEPARTMENT, THE CANADIAN SOCIETY OF ALLERGY AND CLINICAL IMMUNOLOGY, AND REPRESENTATIVES OF INDUSTRY, THE AIA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOTH VOLUNTARY AND LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMS TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE ALLERGIC CAN MORE EASILY CONTROL THEIR CONDITION.

AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL, THE PROCESS OF CHANGE BEGAN IN 1973 WHEN THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS PROPOSED NEW CONSUMER PACKAGING AND LABELING REGULATIONS, AS WELL AS CHANGES TO THE FOOD AND DRUG REGULATIONS, MODIFYING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE LABELING OF FOODS.

FUNDAMENTALLY, ALL OF US -- ALLERGIC AND NON-ALLERGIC ALIKE-- WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S IN OUR FOOD, AND THIS PREMISE SERVED AS THE BASIS FOR DEVELOPING A DETAILED SET OF REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES ON FOOD LABELING. FOR EXAMPLE, PREPACKAGED FOODS, WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, MUST CURRENTLY BE LABELLED WITH A LIST OF INGREDIENTS IN DESCENDING ORDER OF PROPORTION. FOR ALLERGY SUFFERERS AND PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO SUFFER FROM ALLERGIES, THIS HAS MADE LIFE MUCH EASIER.

IN 1988, WE BEGAN THE PROCESS OF EXTENDING REGULATIONS REQUIRING FULL INGREDIENT DISCLOSURE TO THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY. IN JANUARY, MY DEPARTMENT SENT OUT AN INFORMATION LETTER ADVISING DRUG MANUFACTURERS, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND ADVOCACY GROUPS OF OUR INTENTION TO CHANGE DRUG REGULATIONS AND REQUIRE THE FULL DISCLOSURE OF NON-MEDICINAL INGREDIENTS IN DRUGS.

TO DATE, THE RESPONSE FROM INDUSTRY AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS HAS BEEN VERY POSITIVE.

THE PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION OF CANADA FULLY SUPPORTS MANDATORY DISCLOSURE OF NON-MEDICINAL INGREDIENTS. THE ASSOCIATION HAS ALSO DEVELOPED RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW THIS INFORMATION CAN BE BEST RELAYED TO THE CONSUMER.

ONE INDUSTRY LEADER, G.D. SEARLE AND COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED, TOOK A MAJOR STEP FORWARD IN AUGUST, BY MOVING TO FULL VOLUNTARY DISCLOSURE OF ALL INGREDIENTS IN ITS PRODUCTS. EARLY NEXT YEAR, WE EXPECT TO HAVE REGULATIONS DRAFTED REQUIRING ALL MANUFACTURERS TO FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE.

THE RESTAURANT AND FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY TOO HAS BECOME FAR MORE AWARE OF PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE ALLERGIC. INGREDIENT DISCLOSURE IS, OF COURSE, MUCH MORE COMPLEX IN THIS INDUSTRY, WHERE MENUS, SUPPLIERS, AND PERSONNEL CHANGE FREQUENTLY. BUT EVEN HERE THERE IS A REAL OPENNESS TO CHANGE. THE CANADIAN RESTAURANT AND FOODSERVICES ASSOCIATION (CRFA) WILL BE INTRODUCING A VOLUNTARY INDUSTRY PROGRAM TO DEVELOP STANDARDIZED ALLERGY INFORMATION CHARTS IN LIMITED-MENU RESTAURANTS.

WE ALL RECOGNIZE THAT INFORMATION ON FOOD INGREDIENTS MUST BE ACCURATE, AND THIS IS WHY ALL INVOLVED HAVE BEEN PROCEEDING SO CAREFULLY. HOWEVER, I AM CONCERNED THAT THERE MAY BE A FEW FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS WHICH, IN WISHING TO PROVIDE A SERVICE TO THEIR CUSTOMERS, RUSH INTO PROVIDING INFORMATION WITHOUT PROPER PREPARATION, OR FAIL TO PROVIDE FULL INFORMATION. THEREFORE, I HAVE ASKED MY OFFICIALS TO EXPLORE, WITH THE GROUPS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING THE VOLUNTARY PROGRAM, THE MERIT OF MANDATING THE VOLUNTARY PROGRAM THROUGH REGULATIONS.

RECENTLY, THE ASSOCIATION PRINTED 10,000 COPIES OF A BOOKLET ABOUT ALLERGIES, FOOD ALLERGIES AND THE FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY, WHICH IT IS DISTRIBUTING TO ITS MEMBERS. AND I'M TOLD THE RESPONSE OF THE MEMBERSHIP IS VERY ENTHUSIASTIC. EVEN SMALL RESTAURATEURS ARE NOW AWARE OF THE ALLERGY PROBLEM AND WANT TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION.

LATER THIS MORNING, DIANE KIRKPATRICK, DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF CHEMICAL SAFETY OF MY DEPARTMENT'S HEALTH PROTECTION BRANCH WILL BE SPEAKING WITH YOU. I KNOW DIANE WILL BE TELLING YOU MORE ABOUT THE ISSUE OF FOOD ALLERGIES AND THE MEASURES BEING TAKEN TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE.

WHEN I TOOK OFFICE IN 1984, I GAVE MY SUPPORT TO A BROAD CONTEMPORARY DEFINITION OF HEALTH AND AN APPROACH THAT WOULD ENABLE CANADIANS TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR WELL-BEING. THIS APPROACH, OUTLINED IN 1986 WITH THE RELEASE OF THE DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ACHIEVING HEALTH FOR ALL: A FRAMEWORK FOR HEALTH PROMOTION, HAS BEGUN TO CHANGE THE WAY CANADIANS VIEW HEALTH.

IT'S A VISION THAT SEES HEALTH NOT SIMPLY AS THE ABSENCE OF DISEASE BUT RATHER, AS AN OVERALL DIMENSION OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE. THE FRAMEWORK CALLS ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, THE PROVINCES, COMMUNITIES, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, BUSINESS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS TO FIND NEW WAYS TO WORK TOGETHER TO ENHANCE THE WELL-BEING OF CANADIANS.

LOOKING BACK, I AM PROUD THAT THE CONCEPT OF PARTNERSHIPS, MUTUAL AID, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OUTLINED IN THE FRAMEWORK HAS LED TO REAL PROGRESS IN MANY AREAS OF HEALTH -- IN ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE, FAMILY VIOLENCE, NATIVE HEALTH, AIDS, TOBACCO CONTROL AND SENIORS INDEPENDENCE.

WITHIN GOVERNMENT, WE'VE SEEN A GROWING ACCEPTANCE OF THE IDEA THAT POLICIES IN NON-HEALTH DEPARTMENTS CAN, AND SHOULD BE EVALUATED IN TERMS OF THEIR IMPACT ON HEALTH -- THE MOVE TO HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY. AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL, THERE'S BEEN CONSIDERABLE COOPERATION AND COORDINATION BETWEEN MANY DEPARTMENTS ON HEALTH ISSUES.

AND WITH THE HEALTHY CITIES PROJECT -- A CANADIAN FIRST, GAINING MOMENTUM AROUND THE WORLD -- WE HAVE SEEN A MOVE AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL TO CONSIDER THE HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF PLANNING AND POLICY DECISIONS ON THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT. THIS COMMITMENT TO IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH RESOURCES IN THE CITIES WHERE 80% OF CANADIANS NOW LIVE IS A GREAT STEP FORWARD.

THE WORK OF THE ALLERGY INFORMATION ASSOCIATION OFFERS A MODEL OF HOW ONE SMALL GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS CAN WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH SITUATION AND GET THE REST OF THE COMMUNITY TO UNDERSTAND, CARE AND TAKE ACTION ON THE PROBLEM.

WE ARE FORTUNATE IN CANADA TO HAVE A HEALTH CARE SYSTEM THAT IS BOTH TECHNICALLY ADVANCED AND OPEN TO CHANGE. ALL OF US ARE A PART OF THIS SYSTEM. AND ALL OF US CAN BE PARTNERS, WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS THE IDEAL OF HEALTH FOR ALL.

THANK YOU FOR YOU INTEREST, YOUR COMMITMENT AND YOUR CONTINUING SUPPORT.